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A NEW DEPARTURE IN THE STUDY OF MODERN LANGUAGES

As THE means of easy and rapid intercommunication between nations multiply, it becomes more and more important every year that greater attention should be given to the study of foreign modern languages in our public schools. At the present time the most important languages for this purpose are very evidently French and German. For many years to come the study of Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, and all other foreign modern languages, must occupy a much less important place than these.

How these foreign languages can best be taught in our schools and colleges is a question which has received much attention at the hands of experienced educators of this generation. Some have contended that as little or no opportunity could be offered in this country for practical communication in these languages, and as the time of students in our schools is so precious, and their programmes are already overcrowded, the only thing to be attempted should be a tolerable familiarity with the printed pages of foreign books or journals, without any extended effort to *write* or *speak* the language in question. After many years of experience as a teacher this was a conclusion practically reached by the writer a number of years since, and much of his teaching in years past has doubtless been very materially influenced by this conclusion. Within the past two years, however, a modified method of instruction in this department seems likely to do much to place the writing, and even the speaking, of these foreign languages within comparatively easy reach of a vast number of our American students. It is now about two years since M. Mieille, now a professor in the Lycée of Tarbes, Hautes Pyrénées, while in England, devised a method of international correspondence between students and teachers

in France and England, which has been warmly received by educators and students in those two countries, and several thousands on either side of the channel are now entered upon the lists, and mutually rendering each other great aid in becoming familiar with their respective languages.

The process is very simple and eminently practical, being capable of application to students of all ages and grades after they have learned to read and write their own language, and have made some progress in acquiring the foreign tongue. Professor Mieille thinks the system applicable as soon as the student learns to write very simple sentences in the foreign language. On this point I am not prepared to speak with great confidence, but I should incline to give students one or two years' work on the foreign language in an ordinary school course before beginning the correspondence. I confess that then in each added month of my experience thus far I have been inclined to lower steadily the grade of work demanded for a beginning. Then, too, it depends a good deal upon the aptitude of the student, some being quite capable of doing satisfactory work at a much earlier stage of the course than others. But this is a minor detail for each teacher to learn by his own experience.

The method of procedure may be simply described thus: Let those schools, colleges, or individuals, who wish to begin this system, send the names, ages, and addresses of those who wish to correspond to the following well-known firms in Paris: For young students send to MM. Armand Colin et Cie, No. 5 rue de Mezières, Paris; and for older students, teachers, or other mature persons, address: Librairie Hachette, 79 Boulevard Saint Germain, Paris.

These firms will give prompt attention to such requests, assigning to each person whose name, etc., is sent, a suitable correspondent; and these French correspondents write the first letter, in French, to their American friends, who, on receiving the letters, promptly reply in English. After these first letters the next letter from France is written in English, and the second letter from America is written in French. The correspondence

thus commenced is continued, as begun, alternating the two languages. Also all letters *received* which are written in the language of the *receiver* are returned, carefully corrected, to the writer. Thus, if letters are filed, at the end of the year each student has model letters in the foreign tongue, and his own corrected letters for careful study.

I have said that this system is working well between France and England. It is also working, to some extent, between France and Germany, France and Italy; and on this side the water several schools and colleges in Canada are thus in communication with France; and, so far as known, but two institutions in the United States, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tenn., and Swarthmore College, Swarthmore, Pa. In this college about thirty of the students, mostly those in their third and fourth year, a few in their second year, are enrolled as correspondents. The letters, as received, are read aloud in class, sometimes translated, sometimes in French, and are made most interesting topics for the lesson of the day. No one who has not tried the system can fully realize the new life and spirit that are thus infused into a class. Instead of being a dry and dull grammatical lesson, with little direct practical bearing upon daily life, the language is seen at once to have a life and a meaning before little expected by the student. The letters are so distributed that one or sometimes two may be read at the opening of a class, and the eager attention which they receive ensures a deep impression upon the mind of every student. Even the letters in English are read aloud, and the errors committed are not only a source of amusement, but aid much in fixing upon the minds of the students the idioms of the foreign tongue. The acquaintances thus made, too, in foreign lands will be a source of great pleasure and satisfaction when these young people come to cross the sea, as many of them will be sure to do in these days of short ocean voyages and endless traveling facilities unknown to a past generation.

Another incidental, but very important result which such correspondence would secure, on becoming general, would be a

far better understanding between different nations and a consequent drawing together in spirit, and thus would be promoted, in a great degree, the early approach of the time when wars and fighting should be no more and peace would prevail throughout all the world and among all the inhabitants thereof.

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